

Too little, too old, too late?

People over 65 are the group most likely to carry out a threat of suicide in primary care, with about one in four attempts resulting in death.

In fact the older the person the more "successful" they are likely to be in taking their own life. As doctors and nurses in primary care it is crucial that we play our part in doing something about this urgent problem. It's not too late.

Do you know?

- **Depression** in older people is **treatable** and can be successfully managed.
- Almost two thirds of older people who take their own life have been **in touch with a primary care professional** in the weeks before their death.
- In older people who take their own life, depression has often been recognised, but **not managed**.
- **Timely detection** of depression in older people can quite literally **save lives**.

Evidence from a growing body of research, shows that suicide in older people is reasonably well understood; **depression**, underlying **physical ill health and frailty** and **social isolation** are important markers.

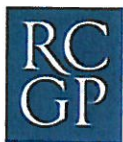
We need to raise our awareness that:

- Building resilience through **health promotion** activity in older people reduces underlying physical frailty.
- Simple, quick and **reliable assessment tools** for depression are easily available and take only a couple of minutes to administer.
- We can take the lead in **tackling social isolation** among older people.
- We can **micro-manage** our consultations with older patients more successfully.

In our consultation with an older patient we can:

- Listen for 'end' centred talk, or even direct communication about suicide; such talk must be taken seriously.
- Listen for clues that the patient is putting their affairs in order, or making or adjusting a will, or who is giving things away.
- Think carefully about patients who are (re)connecting with a faith after a long absence.
- Watch out for older patients presenting with vague non specific symptoms and signs of self neglect.
- Stay alert to the possibility that this time it's not just the same old thing.

REMEMBER: A so called 'failed' attempt at suicide is the key risk indicator for a future attempt.



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Read the *Care Service Improvement Partnership* and *Staffordshire University's Centre for Ageing and Mental Health* review '**Older People and Suicide**' and associated **Fact Sheets** which can be downloaded for free from: <http://www.westmidlands.csip.org.uk/publications/suicide-in-elders-publications.html>